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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBAI 000156

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/5/2019

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SUBJECT: FORMER CHECHEN COMMANDER GUNNED DOWN IN DUBAI

CLASSIFIED BY: Paul R. Sutphin, Consul General, Exec, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Former Chechen commander Sulim Yamadayev was shot and killed on March 28 in the parking lot of the apartment building where he lived in Dubai on March 28. Police officials have publicly called his murder an assassination and said that he was surveilled in the days before his death; however, they have not disclosed a suspected motive for the killing. It is believed to be the first political assassination in Dubai and occurred two days before UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid al Maktoum arrived in Moscow for an official visit.

¶2. (C) Yamadayev's brother Issa and others have claimed publicly that Yamadayev survived the attack and is recovering in a Dubai hospital. Dubai police have stated he was killed at the scene. A journalist told us April 2 that her sources said Yamadayev was buried in the Al Qoz cemetery on March 30 and that she had seen the grave. While at the cemetery, she noted that there were several ethnic Russians, but no Chechens, at the grave. She also said witnesses at the scene of the shooting had seen personnel from the Dubai morgue, not an ambulance, remove the body and there was little doubt that Yamadayev was dead.

¶3. (C) According to Dubai police, Yamadayev was shot once in the head in the underground parking lot of the upscale Jumeirah Beach Residence apartments where he had lived for four months with his wife and children. Two bodyguards had been with him, but neither was armed. One of them tried to stop the attacker but was pistol whacked. Our contact told us police had not initially been aware of Yamadayev's identity, and it is unclear whether he entered the UAE under the assumed name of Suleyman Madov, which was the name police originally released for the deceased. Dubai police have said they arrested up to 20 people, including four Chechens and several ethnic Russians, but none have been charged. Russian Consul Sergey Krasnogor told reporters on April 2 that all Russian citizens had been released. Police have subsequently said they have arrested a prime suspect but have released no further details.

¶4. (C) Websites Kavkazcenter.com and Caucasusnews.com both posted details of the shooting and photos, including assertions that it was Yamadayev and pictures of police at the scene, within hours of the shooting, long before such details were released publicly. Kavkazcenter maintained one of those arrested was a Russian intelligence agent. Our contact said further information on those arrested or possible charges is being tightly held by Dubai authorities.

¶5. (C) Chechen sources have told us that there is a sizable Chechen community in Dubai. They estimate its size from several hundred to several thousand. One Moscow-based contact told us in December that several prominent Chechens have relocated to Dubai or vacation here, including Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. He specifically named Umar and Hussein Dzabrailov, the former considered a suspect in the murder of American citizen Paul Tate, and the latter a former candidate for president of Chechnya and businessman who briefly joined Kadyrov's government. None of them, however, has apparently created any problems that have brought them to the attention of authorities.

¶6. (C) Comment: Yamadayev's murder and its international headlines have been widely talked about in Dubai because of the lack of violent crime here. It does not appear, however, that the Russian-Chechen, or intra-Chechen, troubles have generally spilled over to Dubai/the UAE. Yamadayev had apparently chosen to leave Russia and Chechnya for a quieter life in Dubai. But as an opponent of Chechen President Kadyrov and someone who was allegedly engaged in kidnapping and torture in combating the Chechen separatists, he had many enemies, and it appears one of them followed him here.

SUTPHIN